

THE
IMMORTAL

FIRST



F. GAUNT

(ex-Private, 4th Royal Fusiliers, 9th Brigade,
3rd Division, 2nd Army Corps, 1st B.E.F., France)

A Personal First Hand Record of the First
Hundred Days of the Great War by
a Survivor of the original
Expeditionary Force
1914

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ex-Private F. Gaunt

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A Private Soldier's Diary
of his Experiences with
the original B.E.F., France

By
F. GAUNT

(ex-Private, 4th Royal Fusiliers, 9th Brigade,
3rd Division, 2nd Army Corps,
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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

The writer of this plain personal record of the first hundred days of the war joined the Army in February, 1912. He was among the first to be sent to France in August, 1914, and his story covers the fateful period that followed up to the first Battle of Ypres, on November 11th, 1914, when he was wounded. The narrative was written up while in hospital from a rough diary, and is published as written by the author himself, without any outside assistance or prompting or editing, except that done by the Censor. Gaunt was transferred to the 3rd Norfolk Regt. on being discharged from hospital in 1915, and eventually was discharged from the Army in September, 1916, on account of wounds received in action during the period covered by this bald, unvarnished chronicle of the supreme struggle that stemmed the German deluge and saved France and Europe—a story made precious to the author, as it will be to his readers, by the memory of his comrades in "the contemptible little army" who have not survived.

August 4th, 1917.

The Immortal First

*A Soldier's Diary of the First
Hundred Days of the Great War*

I.

MOBILIZATION.

At 8 p.m. on the night of the 30th July, 1914, the battalion (4th Royal Fusiliers) was ordered to proceed to the Eastern and Western Forts of the Isle of Wight to strengthen the garrison in case of an attack by a hostile Navy, although England had not declared war, but she was almost on the terms of war with a vast empire.

On the night of the 4th August mobilization of the British Forces was ordered, which was quite expected throughout the country, and which caused a great deal of excitement amongst the civilian population.

On the morning of the 5th August the Royal Fusiliers were withdrawn from the Forts, being replaced by the local battalion of Territorials named the Isle of Wight Rifles, so as to allow us to carry on with mobilization. A sergeant and six men were ordered to Newport Railway Station to guard the railway in case of any spies who might blow up the railway bridges, as there were a number of spies in the vicinity of the Island. A large number of Hampshire Special Reservists and Gloucester Territorials were despatched to the Isle of Wight to perform the duties which the Royal Fusiliers had been doing, thus enabling them to proceed to the Theatre of War.

There was great excitement amongst the troops, who were eager to meet their enemy. After standing by for eight days, the order came at last on August 13th : " The Battalion will proceed to South-

ampton for embarkation to proceed to an unknown destination."

EMBARKATION.

On the morning of the 15th at 9 a.m. the right half Battalion of about 550 strong fell in on the parade ground, whence they marched off to Cowes, where they received a great welcome from the civilian population, by whom they were well liked during their term of duty in the garrison. At 11 o'clock the left half Battalion of about the same strength also marched to Cowes, where they joined the other half. The Battalion then crossed to Southampton, where they were met by the General Officer.

After a few hours' hard work loading and unloading supplies we went aboard ship: she had been a merchant vessel, but was fixed up as a troopship for the occasion. * * * There were about 2,500 troops aboard, comprising the 4th Royal

Fusiliers and the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers. Myself, I had rather a tiring job—I was Company Cook. I had been working all night for the last week cooking meat, besides ordinary meals.

ARRIVAL AT HAVRE.

We left Southampton at 5 p.m., and we had a very calm voyage, being a nice summer's day. After we had passed Spithead, the Captain received his orders by wireless to proceed to Havre, a French port in the North of France. We arrived there at 5 a.m. on August 14th, where we were met by some French officials. We had not been there long before a crowd assembled, shouting: "Vive l'Angleterre!" which means "Long live England!"

After a few more hours' hard work unloading supplies and wagons, we marched about 8 miles to a rest camp. It was a very hot day, therefore causing a lot of

fatigue and falling out on the march. It came rather strange to us to keep on the right of the road, which is the custom of foreign countries. We arrived in camp about 4 p.m., where a meal was prepared of cold meat, tea and bread ; we then proceeded to some tents which had been pitched by an advance party. It came down to rain in the evening, which made it rather miserable for the men, who had to mount guard after a hard day's task.

The next day I was told I would be relieved from being a cook, to take over a more important job in which I had been thoroughly trained before the outbreak of war, which was Sanitary Duties—one of the most important duties on active service—to keep billets and camps clean, and to keep away infectious disease, which is more dangerous than the enemy itself.

On Sunday, 16th August, we proceeded to the railway station, where we entrained

for Amiens, which was a twenty hours' journey. There we met the remainder of our Division. The 4th Royal Fusiliers belonged to the 9th Brigade, 3rd Division, 2nd Army Corps, commanded by General Sir H. Smith-Dorrien. Major-General Sir Henry Rawlinson commanded the 3rd Division; Brigadier-General Shaw the 9th Brigade.

From the 17th to the 21st we were engaged in battalion route marches to get ourselves fit for the climate, while we were waiting for the remainder of the Army Corps.

ARRIVAL AT MONS.

On the morning of the 22nd, the 1st and 2nd Army Corps were ordered to the theatre of war in Belgium. We were told that we would not meet the enemy that day, but probably the next, which was Sunday. During our march to Mons we passed many former British battlefields

—Malplaquet being one of them, where Marlborough had a great victory over the French, also Namur.

We passed through the town of Mons between one and two o'clock, where we were greatly welcomed by the population, who gave us an enormous amount of refreshment, etc. We took up position on the banks of a canal beyond Mons. The 2nd Army Corps was composed of the 3rd and 5th Divisions, which each has three Brigades, four Regiments to a Brigade. The Royal Fusiliers was in the 9th Brigade, composed of the Northumberland Fusiliers, Royal Fusiliers, Royal Scots Fusiliers and Lincolnshire Regiment, so it was almost a Fusilier Brigade. Lt.-Colonel N. R. McMahon, D.S.O., commanded 4th Royal Fusiliers. The Brigade was commanded by Brigadier-General Shaw.

II.

THE BATTLE OF MONS TO
THE GERMAN RETREAT
TO THE AISNE.

After being told our position, we entrenched ourselves in along a canal close to a railway bridge, which was being held by our machine gunners ; there were also obstacles of wire entanglements along the line on the bridge. The evening passed very quietly, there being no signs of the enemy. We stood to arms an hour before dawn, which is a usual order on active service, as an attack is always expected at dawn. There were still no signs of the enemy until about nine o'clock, when we saw somebody try to fix a white flag on to a tree. * * * The officer looked through his field glasses and found that it was two of the enemy's patrol. Myself and three others were ordered

to fire at them, which we did, bringing the one down off the top of the tree and also killing the other.

About four hours later, a patrol of Uhlans, one officer and ten men, were sighted on the other side of the canal and our machine gunners were ordered to open fire, which they did, when the enemies' horses turned and galloped away less their riders ; nine men were killed and one wounded, who managed to escape. The officer was also severely wounded, so gave himself up to be taken prisoner. He told our captain that he was a baron ; he seemed to be rather old—about sixty years of age—and had a long beard. He looked very ill for the want of food ; he told our captain (Captain Ashburner, M.V.O., D.S.O.) he had only had chocolate for three days. Our officer was very kind to him, bandaging his leg and arm for

him. He then asked if he could go back and pick up his helmet, which he was allowed to do, our captain assisting him over the barbed wire entanglements. He was too severely injured to be able to escape. After he had come back, he was handed over to an escort, which took him to the General's Headquarters, where he was quartered.

THE FIRST AEROPLANE.

During the afternoon an hostile aeroplane was seen, which we were told afterwards was a German aeroplane having the shape of a bird named an eaglet. A few shots were fired at it, but without success, and then it proceeded back to where the enemy were in hiding.

Then shortly after, the battle began our fellows giving a good field of fire far superior to the enemy's.

But again an aeroplane came over our lines, dropping what we thought were

live bombs, but which turned out to be smoke bombs, to show their artillery our position, which was then very heavily bombarded.

TEN TO ONE.

Then came the sound of trumpets from the enemy's lines, which was the order to advance, and they came on in vast numbers, ten to our one, and ten machine guns to a battalion to our two to a battalion. Each one of our men was equal to three of the enemy as regards shooting, the Germans firing from the hip, therefore causing the shot to go high.

They were met by a very deadly fire from our two machine guns which were on the railway bridge, the officer holding on until every one of his gunners was killed or wounded, then he himself fired the gun, while one of the gunners, though severely wounded, supplied the ammunition. They were both awarded the V.C.,

the officer not surviving to receive it. Their names were *Lieut. Maurice Dease* and *Pte. F. Godley* (4th Royal Fusiliers).

RETIREMENT ON MONS.

We had some very close fighting, one of our men going up to a German and striking him full in the face with his fist.

About five o'clock the order came to retire, which we did, being supported by our reserve companies. We retired in an orderly manner, every man keeping cool, calm and collected—also fighting our way at the same time.

We retired from a village called St. Chislain into the town of Mons, where we were given refreshments by the civilian population who were still there despite the battle. We looked a very dirty lot, our faces being black from the rifle fire. The Roll was called of our Company, which numbered about 85 out of 250,

losing one Captain killed, one Lieutenant also.

After forming the remainder of the Battalion together, which numbered now about 478 out of a total of 1200, we marched to the grounds of a big estate which was being used as a hospital—after we left it was blown to pieces by shell fire, many wounded being in there.

We rested there for about seven hours, which we were very glad of. The night had turned very cold, I myself having no overcoat because I had to leave it in the trench to obey orders to retire and having no time to get it.

We were woke up about 2 o'clock, when we resumed our retirement, and took up another position in some houses which had been left by the inhabitants. We made some loopholes in the wall to fire out of. I could not fire myself, because the top of my rifle had

been smashed the previous day by a bullet which passed into my chum's thumb next to me. So I was told off to be ammunition carrier, which is no pleasant job to keep running out in the open for two or three hundred yards to fetch ammunition, also being a nice target for the enemy.

Whilst fetching ammunition I passed through a yard of a big stable, which afterwards I found contained a large number of farm horses. This I immediately reported to my Company Commander, as I told him they would be suitable for transport. He reported the matter to the Colonel, who ordered that only six were to be taken to make up for the horses we were deficient of.

The houses our men were firing from were full of furniture and wardrobes, but not a thing was taken by our men, as we had strict orders not to loot, which, however, the enemy did when we retired. I

learned that our (2nd) Army Corps was being attacked by three German Army Corps, two of whom were coming straight ahead and the other attacking on the flank, one of them being commanded by Von Kluck, the Crown Prince and Von Bulow.

FRENCH HELP.

Later in the afternoon we had the order again to retire. We had not so many casualties as the day previous, though they were rather heavy. We retired to a place called Le Chateau, where we again took up our position.

At daybreak the enemy was throwing the bulk of his strength against the left of our position. The French Cavalry should have come to our help, but owing to the fatigue of their horses were unable to do so.

Our Artillery showed grand fight against our opponents, also inflicting great

loss, though our guns were outnumbered. There was fine work done by our Cavalry, who covered our retreat by fighting rearguard actions with great activity, thereby inflicting great losses on the enemy.

Our retreat was carried far into the night of the 26th, and throughout the 27th and the 28th, on which date we halted, throwing off the weight of the enemy's pursuit.

In the afternoon we were informed that 40,000 French had arrived on our left, which took off a lot of pressure from the rear of the British forces during their retirement, also causing great losses on the enemy's right flank. This closes the period covering the heavy fighting which commenced on Sunday afternoon, the 23rd August, and which really consisted of a four days' battle.

On the evening of the 28th, during our

retirement, we were followed closely by the enemy's Cavalry ; our retreat was being covered by two of our Cavalry Brigades (3rd and 5th).

The Uhlans were thrown back with considerable loss by these two Cavalry Brigades. The pursuit of the enemy was very vigorous ; we were attacked by two German Corps at the east and west of Ham—this happened about one o'clock on the 29th. On our left flank was the 6th French Army, composed of the 7th Army Corps, four Reserve Divisions and a Corps of Cavalry, which we learned was commanded by a famous French General named Sordet.

Our retirement of the 29th brought us to the north of Compiègne-Soissons, where the French Army were about a day's march from us. About this time it was reported that the right flank of the German Army was reaching a point which

would endanger our line of communications with Havre, so our base was changed to a place called St. Nazaire, with an advance base at Le Mans.

On the 1st September, when we were retiring from the wooded country to the south of Compiègne, one of our Cavalry Brigades was overtaken by some German Cavalry, when we lost a battery of Horse Artillery, and several officers and men were killed and wounded. Very shortly afterwards our luck changed, when some detachments of our 3rd Army Corps, operating on our left, not only recaptured our guns but succeeded in capturing twelve of the enemy's.

SOUTH OF THE MARNE.

About September 3rd we took up position south of the Marne, where we blew up a number of bridges along our front. We then retired some twelve miles behind that position behind

the Seine. During that retirement the enemy had thrown bridges, and also crossed the Marne in very great force, thereby threatening the whole of the British line and also the line of two French Armies.

On September 6th, just after dawn, we changed our position to the right, our left resting on the Marne. Shortly after this was done we had a great battle, which was nothing unusual, on a Sunday. This battle, as far as the 6th French Army, the British Army, the 5th French and also the 9th French Army were concerned, may be said to have finished in the evening of the 10th September, by which time we had driven the enemy back to the line of Soissons-Rheims, when we inflicted a great loss on them, by capturing thousands of prisoners, many guns, and also enormous masses of transports.

The enemy retreated before our advance covered by two of their Cavalry Divisions, which suffered severely. Our own Cavalry did some splendid work ; the 9th Lancers, with the assistance of 18th Hussars, made a gallant charge, the 9th Lancers capturing some guns.

GERMANS IN RETREAT.

On the 8th September the enemy continued their retreat northwards, and our Army was successfully engaged that day with strong rearguards of all arms, on a small river named the Petit Morin, thereby materially assisting the French Armies on our right and left ; against which the enemy was making its greatest efforts. We learned that the enemy held a very strong position on the north bank of the Petit Morin River, with infantry and many guns, but they were dislodged with some considerable loss. We captured many machine guns and many prisoners,

and there were also a large number of dead.

Later on this same day (September 8th) we encountered considerable opposition, but we managed to drive back the enemy at all points, causing them heavy losses, and many more captures.

On the 9th September we forced a passage of the Marne, then we made an advance some miles to the north of it.

On the 9th September the fighting became very severe in the vicinity of a place called Montreuil, where we advanced assisted by our Cavalry, fighting the enemy's rearguard actions of all arms, driving them northwards, where about 2,000 prisoners, several machine guns, and great quantities of transport fell into our hands.

This evening marked the end of the battle which practically commenced on

6th September, still leaving two German Armies in full retreat. Our casualties were rather heavy of killed and wounded, but not so heavy as the enemy's. From the retreat of Mons to the Seine, and from the Seine to the Aisne, we were engaged without one complete day's halt or rest of any kind.

TRANSPORT ADVENTURES.

Here I may mention that on about the sixth day of the retirement I fell out, owing to my feet being all blistered, so I followed up behind the best way I could. I lost my regiment for three days. I enquired for directions from a staff officer whom I came across, but he did not direct me right and sent me the wrong way. I fell in with another man of my regiment, and while we were walking along a road we came across some German Cavalry about 100 yards from us, so

we lay down amongst some cabbages until the road was clear.

After we had gone about two miles we came across some of our Mechanical Transport, to which we attached ourselves until we found our regiment. While we were with the Transport we had an exciting time. We billeted for a night in a big park, and the next morning we took some ammunition up to the firing line to the 4th Division. We were going back to the same park again ; when about 200 yards from it we were fired upon by some German Cavalry (Uhlans). Our drivers at once turned their cars round to get them away into safety ; all except the first three cars, and the officers, and also a despatch rider—these were all captured. Three of the men managed to escape with a lorry and met us the next morning, and told us that the Captain in charge of the convoy was

thrown on to a hayrick to which the Germans set fire. On the third day of being absent from my regiment I rejoined it, and was questioned as to where I had been.

On the 11th one of the French Armies entered the neighbourhood of Chalons, making large captures of guns, and followed the retreating Army of Von Bulow to the town of Rheims.

On Saturday, September 12th, we were informed that the enemy had taken up position on the Aisne and the Suippe, which they had previously prepared, and which is one of the strongest lines in Europe. During this battle of the Marne our men realised that they were fighting against no ordinary foe, but against, they believe, the enemy of mankind. Well, I think September 12th concluded the battles of the Marne, where our troops showed heroic and gallant fighting.

THE HUNS AND CIVILIANS.

Before I go further into the next battles I give a few details of the conduct of the German troops as regards the civil populations. During the retreat from Mons, to our uttermost dismay, while retiring, we saw the Germans oncoming, putting women and children in front of them to shield themselves, thereby at the same time rendering us unable to fire at them, because they knew we were a more civilised army than they were, and they knew we would not fire at them because of killing the women and children. Old men, women and children were murdered wholesale because they would not obey the orders that were given by the Germans. Houses were looted, not leaving anything in the way of food or drink, or any valuables, thus rendering the poor people starving. We came across a great number of refugees on the road, ranging

from the ages of one month up to ninety years. Our fellows were very kind to them, and they were most delighted with our bully beef.

The most remarkable thing was that anyone could tell which way either the enemy or ourselves had gone during the retirement of either side by the simple reason that we had thrown empty jam tins and bully beef tins on the sides of the road during our retirement ; whereas the enemy were different, as during their retirement they threw empty wine bottles away, which they looted by the thousand from the chateaux and restaurants, thereby rendering many of them drunk. That was the time when they could stand up to a good fight, otherwise they were cowards.

LEADERSHIP AND DISCIPLINE.

There is a great difference in their leadership, their officers being in the rear of the men, with revolvers in their hands

threatening the men if they turned their heads they would be killed. Our officers placed themselves in the centre of their platoons, *leading* their men on during a charge, with sword in one hand and revolver in the other, ready to slay the enemy. They are the finest officers men could wish to be under going into action—always keeping cool, calm and collected.

The greatest thing is discipline and to obey orders ; also the passing of verbal messages, as in nine cases out of ten they never get to their destination correctly. For instance, this is one which was passed along :—“ The General sends his compliments and hopes your pouches are full.” By the time it reached the other end, which was about 500 yards, it read like this : “ The General sends his compliments and says you are a fool.” That mistake was made by an old soldier who thought he was big in his way, and took

no trouble to pay attention to the message that was passed to him. * *

AN AERIAL FIGHT.

When on the march and a hostile aeroplane was seen we at once fell out on the side of the road and lay down close to the hedge until it had passed over, as it has been proved by our own aircraft that troops can be seen from above when on the march. There was a fine air duel between one of our airmen and an enemy airman during our march to Ypres, which I shall talk about later as I go on. We opened fire on the aeroplane with our rifles, but without success, so we lost sight of it until about two hours afterwards, when we saw one of our airmen, who was above the enemy aeroplane, dropping bombs on it, thereby causing it to come lower within reach of our rifle fire, which brought it down, the aviator being killed and the machine completely wrecked.

Our airman came down afterwards, to be congratulated by Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien for his fine bit of work, when he, of course, received great cheers from the men as he passed them along the road. A Lieutenant of ours galloped over to the field where the aeroplane fell, but he came back because he could not get close enough, as the General was there. He was an Australian by birth, and very daring ; he did not know what fear meant. I remember him getting a black eye at Mons in a hand-to-hand fight with a German officer.

IN THE TRENCHES.

Our trenches were of different sorts. The communication trenches were 6 to 7 feet deep, so as to allow a man to pass from one trench to another without showing any of his body above the trench. A front line trench is somewhat different ; it is about 3 feet in depth, with 3 feet of

earth thrown on the top, which will stop a bullet from penetrating into a man's body, thus making the trench about 5 feet in total depth, with a width of 3 feet of earth on top. The width of the trench itself is the length of a spade, which is about 3 feet long. Sometimes we fired over the top, or we made loopholes ; the latter afforded us a head cover.

Our rations were brought to us at midnight ; they generally consisted of 1 lb. of bully beef, 1 lb. of bread, 4 ozs. of jam, 4 ozs. of bacon, 2 ozs. of cheese. That was one man's ration for one day. In most cases the men would only eat half of that ration, in case they were unable to get any the next day, because the transports could not always get up to the firing line owing to heavy artillery fire. We claimed to be the best fed army in the field, which we were. Sometimes biscuits would be issued in lieu of bread.

I forgot to say that $\frac{1}{2}$ qtn. of rum was also issued, and sometimes we managed to get some hot tea, or a bully beef stew, which we were very glad of on a cold night. We also received plenty of tobacco and cigarettes after the first two months; these generally came through the "Weekly Dispatch" Fund, which the people at home gladly sent us.

When we went into billets we were sometimes able to get some pay, generally about five francs, which is equal to 4s. 2d. in English money. That enabled us to buy extras, such as meat, butter or bread, etc., from the shops that were spared by the German shells.

We all managed to learn a little French, especially in the way of food and drink. Our Tommies were great favourites with the civil population, many of them asking us to teach them the English language in exchange for French. They would very

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often cook food for us. They are expert at making coffee, but at making tea they are no good, because they *would* put the tea into the cold water, then put it on the fire to boil, which gave it a very nasty taste when finished.

We had to be very careful as to the water we drank, as the Germans sometimes poisoned the water before they retired. Sometimes the Germans would give themselves up in large numbers because they were starving and they knew the kind way they would be treated if they fell into the hands of the British. Many of the prisoners would give us their helmets.

FIGHTING ON THE AISNE.

I will now carry on with the fighting on the Aisne. We received orders that we were going to advance across the River Aisne. We found that all the bridges had been blown up by the enemy during

their retreat, so we started to work at once building pontoon bridges, so as to enable the troops to proceed across. Our Division (the 3rd) commenced a further advance, and we nearly reached the plateau of Aixy when we were driven back by a powerful counter-attack supported by heavy artillery. The Division fell back in the best of order, and finally we entrenched ourselves about a mile from Vailly Bridge.

On the 15th we were bombarded by heavy artillery, which we learned afterwards came from 8-inch siege guns with a range of 10,000 yards. Our troops suffered very heavy losses from this artillery fire. Our Division again advanced, and we regained all the ground we had lost. On the 15th we, therefore, formed a most powerful and effective bridge head.

On the 17th, 18th and 19th we were again heavily bombarded. On the evening

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of the 19th and throughout the 20th the enemy again showed considerable activity. On the night previous our Division repulsed a severe counter-attack with considerable loss. We also repulsed another violent counter-attack on the 21st, the enemy losing heavily.

On the afternoon of the 23rd we were informed that two 6-inch howitzer batteries had been allotted to our Army Corps (the 2nd). They were brought into action on the 24th with very good results.

WOOD FIGHTING.

France is a woody country and hilly in some places, with canals and rivers running here and there. The Germans would often try to get us to advance into a wood so that they could bombard us with their artillery.

The 4th Battn. Royal Fusiliers were well trained in wood fighting, that being

one of Col. McMahon's chief trainings in peace time ; the old-fashioned forest (Parkhurst Forest, Isle of Wight) being one of his training grounds. Wood fighting is no easy task, as you always find a lot of obstacles, so it is necessary to carry bill-hooks and wire cutters, which are small implements which a soldier can carry on his equipment. Stretcher bearers must keep their eyes open for gaps and passages, which would enable them to get the wounded away without trouble. If a man is dangerously wounded in the leg, his rifle would serve him as a splint for it, and also in case of having no bandage his puttee is taken off and used to bind the rifle to his leg, thus enabling him to be carried away without causing so much pain, and probably saving his life at the same time.

It is a very easy thing to be made prisoner in wood fighting, as one can

easily lose one's way, as there is nothing to guide you.

Street fighting is also one of the worst sorts of fighting, as the streets have many alleys leading into fields. For instance at a place called Herliere, near Armentieres, we had to dig up cobbles to make barricades, and also to make a cover for us, so that we could take up a position. Furniture was also used to make barricades. Though this village was being heavily shelled by the enemy, some of the inhabitants still remained in the basements of their houses.

III.

THE MOVEMENT TO THE
NORTH.

On the 3rd October we were withdrawn from the Aisne. The Army Corps withdrew in succession at intervals of a few days, the whole movements of the British troops being completed by the 19th October. Our Corps (2nd) arrived at a place between Aire-Bethune on the 11th October, where we connected with the right of the 10th French Army. The great battle of this new theatre of war commenced on October 11th, when we advanced in the direction of Merville.

Our Division (3rd), having crossed the Aire-Bethune Canal, deployed on the left of the 5th Division ; and the whole of our Army Corps (2nd) again advanced to the attack. But we were unable to make much headway owing to the difficult

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character of the ground upon which we were operating, which is somewhat similar to that usually found in manufacturing districts, and was covered with mining work factories, &c. The ground throughout the country is remarkably flat, rendering effective artillery support very difficult. Before nightfall, however, they had made some advance and had successfully driven back hostile counter-attacks, with great loss to the enemy and destruction of their machine guns.

GENERAL HAMILTON KILLED.

The fighting of our Army Corps (2nd) continued throughout the 14th October. On this day our Division suffered a loss in that the Commander of our Division (3rd), General Hubert Hamilton, was killed. I had to take a message to the Divisional Headquarters, when I saw General Hamilton standing behind a hay

stack. Suddenly a Jack Johnson case came over and exploded about five yards from him, thus killing him outright. He was succeeded by Major General J. A. L. Haldane.

We buried General Hamilton in the little churchyard of Lacoutre. Just at the moment when the priest was saying the last prayers the guns began to roar again, and projectiles whistled over the heads of the mourners.

Next day our Division (3rd) avenged its leader's death by a brilliant advance across the dykes by means of planks which we placed, and driving the Germans from village to village till we had pushed them off the Estaires-La Basse road.

On the 16th our Division (3rd) was close upon Aubers ; on the following day our Brigade (9th), under Brigadier-General Shaw, took the village, and late that same

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evening our Regiment (4th Royal Fusiliers) and the 1st Lincolns took the village of Aubers at the point of the bayonet.

It was a fine charge ; every man showed his fighting attitude and drove his bayonet home with British pluck.

Previously, in this battle of Northern Flanders, we had been fighting against German Cavalry and had made progress ; but at the latter part we were fighting against the wall of the main German line.

On the 18th counter-attacks began which we succeeded in repulsing.

On October 19th the 2nd Royal Irish Regiment, under Major Daniell, in General Doran's 8th Brigade of the 3rd Division stormed and carried the village of Le Pilly.

Next day the German supports from Lille arrived, and the gallant battalion was cut off after heavy losses.

THE INDIAN CONTINGENT.

On the 20th October there arrived somewhere west of Bethune the Lahore Division of the Indian Army. The whole of the Indian Army was under Lieutenant-General Sir James Willcocks. The Indian troops were a fine body of men, the Ghurkas being only about 4 feet 9 inches to 5 feet 3 inches ; the Sikhs were much taller — 5 feet 10 inches to 6 feet 3 inches. They would cook their dinner with one hand and eat it with the other, rice and curry and potatoes being one of their favourite dishes. There was always a British regiment with a regiment of Indian troops in the trenches. * * *

After the first fortnight it was a job to keep them in the trenches, as they would creep out, with knife in hand, and go over to a German trench. * * *

On the morning of the 24th October the enemy commenced a heavy attack, but

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suffered great loss, leaving many dead and prisoners behind them.

Our Army Corps became exhausted owing to the constant reinforcement of the enemy and the length of line which had to defend, and the enormous loss which it had suffered.

On the 25th a body of Indian troops relieved us from the trenches, so we went into billets about four miles behind the firing line, where we had rest which we well earned and much needed.

HEAVY LOSSES.

We had suffered very heavily during the battle of La Bassee from the 19th to the 25th. When the Roll was called we had a total of 345 men and 5 officers left out of 975, which was the total strength before going into the battle.

It was a Godsend to be able to have wash and shave and also some sleep

which we greatly needed, having had little for many days.

On the 27th October we shifted out of our billets into fresh ones at a place called Bailleul.

About mid-day on the 5th November we had the order to fall in once again, after feeling much better for our rest and change of clothing. We marched off in the direction of Ypres, and after we had done about five miles we halted in the neighbourhood of Locre, where we stopped until dusk.

We marched through the beautiful town of Ypres, which was deserted by its inhabitants, with its ancient buildings, the Cloth Hall being one of them and very fine. We crossed over the Yser Canal into a wood between Hooze and Veldhoek, where we took up position.

On Friday, the 6th November, a sudden attack began ; the German attack

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was pressed in force, but they were repulsed. On the 7th there were two counter-attacks, but they also were repulsed with great loss to the enemy.

Once more came a period of ominous quietness. It lasted throughout the 8th, 9th and 10th, when nothing happened but a little shelling, except on Sunday, the 8th, when a bayonet charge took place. Owing to so many regiments making the charge there was not room for all of us to get into the trench we had taken. On this occasion I saw a French officer who was in charge of a company of Zouaves get killed. * * *

I went behind a tree under heavy shell fire, where for an hour I employed myself in bandaging up the wounded, chiefly the Northamptonshires ; but nobody saw me so I did not get recommended.

I could not find my own regiment, the confusion was great, so I spent the

night in a dug-out with the Northampton-shires. About 2 a.m., while it was still dark, I recognised the voice of my regimental Sergeant-Major outside, as reinforcements were coming up, and I was able thus to rejoin my regiment.

GENERAL MACMAHON'S LAST WORDS.

On the 10th November our company was relieved from the front-line trench and put in the reserve trench about 150 yards behind. On Wednesday, the 11th, we were heavily bombarded by artillery, which started at daybreak (6 a.m.) and continued right up to 11 o'clock without a stop. During this time my Commanding Officer, Brigadier-General MacMahon, D.S.O., was struck by two pieces of shrapnel on the head and was killed. His last words were : " Don't retire the Fusiliers ! "

We all very much regretted his loss, as

we were much attached to him. When he was promoted Brigadier-General he was ordered to take over the 7th Brigade for a short time. When he was killed, Brigadier-General Shaw remarked, "My right hand man has gone, so I must take his place." When going into billets General Shaw would always shout : "Here come my Fusiliers !"

About 9 a.m. I was sitting down in the trench enjoying a bit of bread and Tickler's plum jam, when I got struck by a piece of shrapnel close to the spine ; but I could not get out of the trench, owing to it being shelled too heavily. About one hour afterwards a shell burst close to me, and I felt something burst in my ear, which I found out was the drum of the ear.

At 11 a.m. the shells stopped, and then I was able to get out of the trench and have my wound dressed at the first

dressing station, which was about two miles away ; after that I had to walk four miles to the hospital, the road being heavily shelled while I was dragging along. I arrived there about 2 p.m., where my wound was properly dressed. After being dressed, I received a hot meal of bully beef, then I had a sleep until a shell dropped in the hospital yard, which woke me up. Unfortunately, one of the R.A.M.C. orderlies, who was crossing the yard at the time, was killed.

At 4 p.m. I had some tea, and then I got into a motor ambulance which took me to Poperinghe, where I stopped for the night, entraining for Boulogne the next morning.

Whilst in Boulogne Hospital, Lord Roberts visited us, which was much appreciated ; and he spoke to every man in the hospital, stopping and stooping down to each bed ; but a few mornings later,

we received the sad news that he had caught a chill and died.

I stopped in Boulogne till Sunday, 15th November, then at 12 noon we were embarked for England's shore, having a rather rough journey across. Our boat arrived at Southampton about 8 p.m. ; we did not go ashore that night, as we slept on board, myself sleeping at the bottom of the stairway leading to the saloon.

We went ashore at 9 a.m. the following morning, where we were put into a hospital train, which, to my delight, was going to Waterloo Station. We got to Waterloo at 11.30, where we were met by the British Red Cross Motor Ambulances. The car I got into went to St. Bartholomew's Hospital, which is situated in the vicinity of Smithfield Meat Market. Myself living in London, at Chelsea, made it very convenient for my relations to come and see me.

THE ANGELS OF MONS.

Since my return to England I have often been asked, as I took part in the retreat from Mons, if I had seen or heard anything of the vision of Angels, about which there had been so much discussion. I can only say that about August 28th, after we left Mons we arrived at a large building. We had been harassed by the Germans all day and we were very exhausted and tired, and we lay down in the Courtyard. It was between 6 and 7 p.m. I was lying on my back half dozing, when I looked up, and saw in the sky a curious effect, which looked like a number of spirits or angel forms. I pointed it out to the others. Later on I mentioned it to others, and they said they had seen the same appearance. I never saw it when fighting, or any definite apparitions between us and the enemy. When I came back wounded to England I heard it

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reported that Angels had been seen, and some men have told me that they saw them clearly.!

Thus ended my experiences of the war in France with the Regiment of the famous Royal Fusiliers, 7th Foot.



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